Love in *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* (Essay), Bee Wertheimer

I didn't like Gabrielle Zevin's *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow* for a lot of reasons. I found the characters uninteresting in their stubborn refusal to develop, the plot too mundane to justify its length, and the tone generally condescending. Near the end of the novel, our leading lady, Sadie, reflects on her position as a game design professor and kids these days. She says, "My class talks a lot about their *traumas*. And how their *traumas* inform their games. They, honest to God, think their traumas are the most interesting thing about them." And isn't that just a slap in the face to the reader, who just endured 400 pages of nothing but Sadie and Sam's traumas! I was rooting for this book to be good, I really was—to earn its critical acclaim, to shed insight on the struggles and successes of game designers, or at least what it means to be a creative and a collaborator. It's not necessarily bad for a novelist to get things wrong about a craft they don't specialize in (which happens a lot here), but as a game designer with a romantic/creative partner, the experiences detailed in this book are so ridiculous that there are no universal truths to be found.

Zevin's 2022 novel follows two game designers, Sadie and Sam, throughout their lives as creative collaborators and participants in the worst situationship known to man. I have a lot in common with Sadie, as a woman in the male-dominated game design industry. Like Sadie, I have been dismissed by male professors who think they know better than me. Like Sadie, I have had press overlook my work on collaborative projects with my male partner. But unlike Sadie, I am not evil—as a child, she exploits her friendship with Sam to get community service credit for her bat mitzvah, and as an adult, she abandons Sam to run their shared company by himself after the absurd death of Marx, their third. For 30 long years, Sadie and Sam are allergic to communicating with each other, which

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is tedious to read—if I wanted to deal with grown adults refusing to share their feelings, I'd call my parents.

The first time my partner and I made a game together, it almost destroyed our relationship. We had drastically different design philosophies, and struggled to fit our individual goals into the constraints of an assignment. But because we're normal people who love each other, we put aside our personal feelings and worked out a (difficult) compromise. I can't imagine Sam and Sadie, many years our elders, demonstrating this bare minimum effort for one another.

And the thing is, that was a hard and unexpected lesson to learn, that my romantic relationship would be tested by our creative collaboration. What makes us compatible as romantic partners can also make us butt heads as game designers. And that's interesting! It's a weird and complicated beast, making art with the person you love, especially when one of you is more successful than the other. And that notion isn't truly explored at all in *Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow*, because Sadie values her and Sam's shared genius too much to risk romance or, like, basic communication with him (this restraint does not extend to Sam's best friend and their producer, of course). Sadie and Sam's love for one another exists as a force *in spite of* their collaboration, never in the same room. It makes no sense to me.

The actual handling of game design in this book is ridiculous. It would have been very easy to make this story about two writers, a field Zevin is clearly competent in, but for reasons beyond me she chose to dive head-first into a craft that, no, will not make your

fingers bleed from too much time spent programming. I think it is fair to presume the reader knows who Mario and Donkey Kong are if they chose to pick up a book about game design, and even if they don't, it's not a hard thing to Google, so please stop explaining the premise of the most famous arcade games on the planet to me. *Doom* I can understand, but *Mario?* They made a movie about that guy!

The actual development cycle of Sam and Sadie's first game, *Ichigo*, plays perfectly into the obsessive, starving artist stereotype, and brings nothing new or interesting to the table. Game designers are actually overworked because of their pure passion and drive, not because a company demands it of them—it's simply in our nature to work nonstop at the detriment of our physical health. It's a prerequisite to genius, actually, so don't bother if you're not willing to starve for it. And the students Sadie goes on to teach, after her own horrible time as a student aspiring to develop games in the face of relentless misogyny? Rather than being glad her students have to fight less than she did, she clearly resents them for it, which was really fun and enjoyable to read as a game design student myself. I loved having a fictional character mock me for how easy I have it as the games industry crumbles around me.

The point here is that game designers are human beings. You do not need to be incapable of love to make games. And, yes, the book claims to be about Sam and Sadie's love, but nothing about how they treat each other—how they go years without speaking, how they always choose themselves over one another—supports that. There is so much potential for a story about game design partners, and it's a shame that Zevin failed to see it.